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ABSTRACT

A study explored (1) the types of teacher oral feedback statements student speakers identify as helpful in improving their speeches, and (2) the types of oral feedback they identify as making them feel either good or bad about their speaking abilities. The student speakers--two female graduate students and a female graduate teaching assistant--were given one week to prepare an informative speech. The speeches were then videotaped, along with the instructor's oral critiques. While viewing the tapes, the students identified statements they perceived as helpful in improving their speaking ability and those that either increased or decreased their self-esteem. Students most frequently identified as helpful the feedback that was directed toward them personally and which focused on specific features of the speeches. They perceived complimentary feedback as promoting good feelings about their speaking abilities, but of limited usefulness in helping them learn how to improve their skills. Critical statements were sometimes perceived as promoting negative feelings; however, in some cases, these statements were perceived as enhancing self-esteem. This was most likely to occur when the critical comments were accompanied by positive nonverbal immediacy behaviors, such as smiles and reassuring gazes. (FL)

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A GROUNDED ETHNOGRAPHIC INQUIRY

INTO

TEACHER ORAL FEEDBACK

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ABSTRACT

This grounded ethnographic study examined students' responses to naturally occurring teacher oral feedback. While viewing videotaped critiques of student speeches, students identified feedback statements perceived as helpful in learning to give better speeches and statements that increased or decreased their self-esteem. Speakers most frequently identified as helpful feedback directed toward them personally and which focused on specific features of their speeches needing improvement. Complimentary feedback was perceived to promote good feelings about one's speaking abilities but also of limited usefulness in helping students learn how they can improve upon their speaking skills. While critical statements were sometimes perceived as promoting negative feelings about one's speaking ability, in several instances they were perceived as actually enhancing one's self-esteem. Analysis of the videotapes indicated that critical feedback was likely to increase self-esteem when it was accompanied by positive nonverbal immediacy behaviors (e.g., smiles and reassuring gaze).

A Grounded Ethnographic Inquiry Into Teacher Oral Feedback

A common assignment in basic speech communication courses is the oral report or speech. There are essentially two ways in which teachers learn to provide feedback on student speeches. One way is through face-to-face interactions with experienced teachers, either through formal apprenticeship programs, including student teaching, internship, and instructional assistant programs, or informal modeling of teachers perceived as appropriate role models. In addition, some teachers refine their feedback practices in accordance with information disseminated in textbooks, journal articles, and other secondary sources.

There is much variability in what prospective teachers learn about feedback from these disparate sources. Since no two apprenticeship programs are exactly alike, and because teachers vary greatly in the ways in which they give feedback, apprenticeship programs and role modeling are certain to yield a teacher population heterogeneous in its understanding of what constitutes desirable feedback practices. Similarly, secondary sources are also diversified in their suggestions about what constitutes desirable feedback procedures. To illustrate this point, consider that 19 distinctly different suggestions of how to provide speech feedback are made by the authors of five commonly used speech communication methods books: Speech Communication in the Secondary School, (Allen, Willmington & Sprague, 1976), Teaching Speech Communication, (Newcombe & Robinson, 1975), Teaching Speech Communication in the Secondary School, (Brooks & Friedrich, 1973), Teaching Speech, (Reid, 1971), and Teaching Speech, (Lewis, Everett, Gibson, & Scheon, 1969).

Diversity is also to be found among the feedback recommendations discussed in speech communication journal articles. For example, Montgomery (1957) recommends that teachers use oral rather than written feedback and, in addition, refrain from writing during students' performances. Holtzman (1960) suggests teachers should augment their own identification of speech strengths and weaknesses by including the entire class in the critiquing process. Erhart (1976) suggests that instructors could use a performance appraisal system, developed in business and industry, to help student speakers. Dedmond (1967) claims that the best criticism is given when oral and written feedback are combined. As with the authors of the oral communication education texts, these journal article authors make many different suggestions about how feedback can best be provided, with there being little clear cut agreement among any of them.

Clearly, then, the above discussed sources cannot be relied upon to yield consistent information about desirable and undesirable feedback procedures. Further, neither is there a widely accepted extant theoretical or empirical rationale for arguing in favor of certain of these feedback procedures rather than others. Consequently, the feedback teachers learn to provide is mostly a matter of personal taste and happenstance, rather than logical, rigorous inquiry and validation.

Our lack of knowledge about what is desirable feedback is troublesome for two reasons. First, it is entirely possible that at least some of the commonly used feedback procedures are detrimental to learning. Were these detrimental procedures identified, educators could replace them with more effective procedures. However, since research is lacking which allows us to identify detrimental and

beneficial procedures, we simply do not know which current practices ought be deleted, modified, supplanted, or continued. Second, even if many of the existing practices were beneficial, without programmatic research we cannot learn how to make this feedback even better. For both of these reasons, then, oral feedback procedures cannot improve without programmatic, systematic evaluation.

Although our knowledge of feedback practices is deficient, it would be inaccurate to say that it is nonexistent. A few interesting efforts have been made to systematically analyze and evaluate feedback of student speeches. A discussion of these studies is necessary to appreciate how this line of research can be most meaningfully advanced.

Literature Review

Bostrom (1963) was the first modern researcher to study systematically the impact of feedback on students. In an effort to determine the effects of feedback on "stimulating interest in and respect for speechmaking" Bostrom tested the effects of positive and negative feedback on student attitudes toward speechmaking. Students presented extemporaneous speeches to a panel of judges. Prior to the speeches Bostrom determined by chance which students would receive positive and negative oral evaluations. Ten positive and ten negative statements were prepared in advance. The feedback consisted of four oral statements, either all positive or all negative, which in the evaluator's judgment best fit the strong or weak points in the student's speech. Before and after participating in this research the students completed a questionnaire measuring: willingness to give speeches, self-rating of speaking ability, perceived importance of speechmaking to society, and attitudes toward persuasive and

informative speaking. Bostrom found that positive feedback effected more willingness to give speeches and higher self-ratings about one's speaking ability than did negative feedback, but that there were no systematic differences between positive and negative feedback in affecting perceived importance of speechmaking to society or changes in attitude toward persuasive and informative speaking.

All positive and all negative feedback was found, then, to affect students' attitudes toward speechmaking and ratings of themselves as speakers. Bostrom's feedback, however, cannot be assumed to approximate the feedback teachers provide students. Even though Bostrom matched the positive statements to the strong aspects of students' speeches and the negative statements to the weak aspects, the feedback remains unrealistic because teachers rarely provide all positive or all negative feedback. Thus, while it may be true that student attitudes toward speechmaking are more positive when they receive all positive and are worsened when they receive all negative feedback, Bostrom's findings do not help us understand how students respond to feedback consisting of more frequently occurring combinations of positive and negative statements.

It should be noted that Bostrom has been the only researcher who thus far studied the impact of speech teachers' feedback on their students' self-esteem. While he only studied one aspect of self-esteem, students' ratings of themselves as speakers, he nonetheless made an effort to consider an important and commonly ignored relationship, and it is unfortunate that Bostrom's initial contributions in this area have not been pursued by other researchers. In an extensive review of the self-concept literature, Gergen (1966) argues convincingly that the bulk of available evidence demonstrates

clearly that "appraisal communication" (feedback) greatly affects one's self-esteem. In keeping with basic tenets in communication theory, he further argues that the more credible the source of the appraisal, the more substantial the impact on self-esteem. Since teachers are usually perceived as credible sources, at least in their area of expertise (Civickly, 1982), it is reasonable to apply Gergen's line of thought to speech communication classrooms and argue, as have Hurt, Scott and McCroskey (1978), that speech communication teachers can have substantial impact not only on their students' learning, but on their self-concepts as well. Unfortunately, because no one has since followed up on Bostrom's initial findings, there is little additional information allowing us to explore other interesting implications.

It was not until ten years after Bostrom's study, that another study on teacher feedback appeared in the speech communication literature. Sprague (1971) went beyond the either entirely positive or entirely negative feedback scheme used by Bostrom and developed instead a four dimensional system for categorizing speech communication teachers' written and oral feedback. Sprague's categories consist of the following: content -statements that deal with organization, support, ideas, language, style or audience analysis; delivery -statements that deal with voice, body, visual aids, articulation, fluency or interaction with the audience; positive -statements which praise, commend, or compliment the speaker or indicate a standard has been met; negative -statements which criticize, mention weaknesses or suggest improvement; personal -statements which address student improvement or teacher affect, include the student's name, make reference to the student's or

teacher's personal lives or refer to other students in the class; impersonal -statements which deal with principles of good speaking or are more cognitive than affective; holistic -statements dealing with the total speech performance; atomistic -statements dealing with an isolable element of the speech performance.

According to Sprague's system each written statement is categorized in four ways: as content or delivery, positive or negative, personal or impersonal, holistic or atomistic. For example, the statement "Good speech" would be classified as content, positive, impersonal, and holistic. In her initial study on written feedback, Sprague found that more highly rated speeches received more positive and holistic statements than less highly rated speeches. Also, female teachers wrote more statements about delivery and their statements tended to be more positive and personal than statements written by male teachers.

Using Sprague's categories, Vogel (1973) and Young (1974) also conducted studies on written feedback. To determine what feedback helped students improve their speeches, Vogel randomly assigned one of three feedback conditions to students: negative, impersonal, and atomistic (e.g., "The concluding sentence was poor"); positive, impersonal, and atomistic (e.g., "Good transition between second and third points"); or positive, personal, and atomistic (e.g., "I really liked your opening illustration"). Students received their designated type of feedback twice, after their first and second speeches. Improvement of performance was determined by comparing ratings and rankings of the students after their first, second, and third speeches. Vogel did not find any significant differences in speech improvement attributed to differences in feedback. He did, however,

find that speaking ability improved with practice regardless of the type of criticism employed.

In Young's (1974) study, students rated 32 feedback statements and identified as most helpful those statements which were negative, personal, and atomistic (e.g. "Your introduction needs to preview your main points"). Comments rated least helpful were negative, personal, and holistic (e.g. "Your speech needs work").

Two studies applied Sprague's system to oral feedback. In both of these studies the researchers utilized naturally occurring feedback. Wiley (1977) audiotape recorded teachers' oral feedback statements given in class and then compared the statements with student generated course evaluations. The results indicated that female teachers gave significantly more atomistic statements than did male teachers, male students received more atomistic statements than did female students, and female students received more positive statements than males. The findings that female students received more positive feedback than males was also confirmed in a dissertation study conducted by Pearson (1976). Wiley also found that teachers gave more positive oral feedback to students receiving high grades, while teachers rated highest by their students gave more content and holistic statements than those teachers rated lowest.

Sprague and Schenone (Note 1) conducted the most recent study on teachers' oral feedback. They found that when orally critiquing female students' presentations, both male and female teachers gave more feedback focusing on content than delivery. Conversely, when critiquing male students' presentations, both male and female teachers gave more feedback focusing on speech delivery than content.

Methodologically, the above studies can be grouped into two

categories according to the type of stimulus materials used in their research designs. In the Bostrom (1963), Vogel (1973), and Young (1974) studies, feedback statements were constructed by the researchers themselves and merely presumed to reflect naturally occurring feedback statements. In none of the three studies were feedback statements used which had been taken from feedback actually given by teachers evaluating student speeches. Thus, it is not clear whether these findings are generalizable to naturally occurring teacher-student interactions. Three of the studies (Sprague, 1971; Wiley, 1977; Sprague & Schenone, Note 1) used naturally occurring feedback statements, but as with most of the feedback studies reported to date, relied upon Sprague's categories for analyzing the feedback. Sprague's categories are what teacher-researchers think to be salient about teacher feedback, and may or may not reflect what students perceive to be salient about teacher feedback. Here again, there is a problem with generalizability. If students use a distinctly different analytical scheme for processing feedback than what has been developed by Sprague, then it may be that while the above studies have internal validity, they lack external validity in that their findings do not reflect the most important or interesting of student responses to teacher feedback.

A solution to these methodological problems would be to conduct a series of investigations using naturally occurring teacher feedback statements and solicit from students their evaluations of that feedback in such a manner that the questions asked of the students would not bias their responses ahead of time. With these responses, one would then be able to compare their perceptions of what is salient about teacher feedback with previously reported findings of studies

which had used researcher generated feedback statements. These comparisons would allow one to test the generalizability of previously obtained findings, thus, establishing a firmer conceptual and empirical base upon which to premise future studies and theory development. Accordingly, the present investigation was undertaken.

Selltiz, Wrightsman & Cook (1976) discuss a research method termed "analysis of 'insight stimulating' examples." The analysis of "insight stimulating" examples is fruitful in that it provides researchers with valuable understanding of a phenomenon which has previously recieved little attention and suggests hypotheses for future research. Selltiz, et al., discuss three features of the insight stimulating examples method which make it an aacceptable scientific procedure: (1) the attitude of the researchers must be one of "alert receptivity" to the phenomenon rather than one of testing, (2) the intensity of the study must be sufficient to obtain information necessary to characterize and explain the phenomenon by using the individuals being studied as informants rather than merely objects of analysis, and (3) the researchers must use their integrative powers to draw together the diverse bits of information discovered and develop a unified interpretation of the phenomenon.

In seeking to determine students' perceptions of naturally occurring teacher feedback, we entertained Selltiz' et al., ideas by intensively analyzing students' responses to examples of teacher feedback. Frankel and Beckman's (1982) grounded ethnography procedure was determined to be the best way we could approach the phenomenon as their procedure allowed us to be receptively alert, rely on the participants' interpretations of the phenomenon, and to integrate our findings with past research concerning teacher feedback. Because of

the method of study resulting from the blending of the two aforementioned procedures was inordinately intense, this study examined limited examples of teacher feedback, but these few supplied sufficient information to characterize and explain student responses to the feedback process and to suggest future directions of study.

Research Questions

The present study was an attempt to replicate Young's and Bostrom's findings using oral teacher feedback not subject to the criticisms discussed above. Using naturally occurring teacher feedback, students identified feedback statements which they perceived as helpful in learning how to give better speeches, and also identified feedback statements which made them feel good or bad about themselves as speakers. Specifically, the following research questions were posed:

Research Question # 1: What types of oral teacher feedback statements are identified by speakers as helpful to them in improving their speeches?

Research Question # 2: What types of oral feedback statements are identified by speakers as making them feel good or bad about their speechmaking abilities?

Methodology

Research Design and Data Collection

Two female students and a female graduate teaching assistant participated in this study. The students and participant instructor were told the study was designed to investigate student perceptions of instructor feedback. The student speakers were given one week to prepare an informative speech 4 to 5 minutes in length. Their speech

topics were only limited in that they were required to discuss some facet of the human communication process. At a predetermined and convenient time for the speakers and participant instructor, the two speeches were presented. The participant instructor gave an oral critique to each speaker. Both critiques were videotaped.

Within two weeks thereafter, the speakers met individually with the researcher to view and respond to one of the videotaped critiques. The students were instructed to stop the tape whenever they heard or saw something within the videotape which they perceived as important. Participants were taught how to stop the tape using the pause button on a search control device (Sony Auto Search Control, model number RX-353). This device has an illuminated, digital display which indicates, at all times during the replay of a videotape, the number of minutes and seconds having elapsed since the beginning of the tape. Whenever the student stopped the tape, the researcher recorded the minutes and seconds which had elapsed.

Each student viewed and responded to her videotape at least three times. The first time through the student was asked to stop the tape whenever she saw or heard something which she felt would help her to improve her speechmaking. The second time through she was asked to stop the tape whenever she saw or heard something that made her feel good about her speechmaking abilities. The third time through she was asked to stop the tape whenever she saw or heard something that made her feel bad about her speechmaking abilities.

Participants

Gender of Participants. Two female speakers were selected from an available pool of 12 female student volunteers enrolled in two sections of an introductory communication class at a large midwestern

university. Gender of participants was controlled by using only females, because gender of students has been found to affect the types of feedback teachers give (Sprague, 1971; Pearson, 1976; Wiley, 1977; Sprague & Schenone, Note 1).

Public Speaking Apprehension Levels of Participants. For each prospective participant, public speaking apprehension scores were determined by administering the Personal Report of Public Speaking Apprehension (PRPSA), a standardized, reliable, and valid instrument measuring apprehension associated with public speaking. The standardized mean score for the PRPSA is 114.62, the standard deviation 17.21, and internal reliability .84 (McCroskey, 1970). The participants were not highly apprehensive. Highly apprehensive students were not asked to participate because 80 to 90 percent of students comprising college courses are not highly apprehensive and because highly apprehensive students are more self-focused and, therefore, less attentive to feedback (Hurt, Scott, & McCroskey, 1978).

Participant Instructor

The participant instructor was chosen from a pool of six female speech communication graduate teaching assistants who had all volunteered to participate in the study. Only females were considered, because gender of instructor has been shown to affect the types of feedback given (Sprague, 1971; Wiley, 1977; Sprague & Schenone, Note 1). In addition, because an objective of this study was to identify teacher feedback which is helpful and promotes good feelings about student speechmaking abilities, two additional criteria were established: evidence or testimony that the participant instructor was an excellent teacher and had experience providing oral

critiques. The person chosen to be the participant instructor met these two criteria in that her teacher evaluations were consistently and exceptionally high (6.2 to 6.3 on a 7 point scale where 7 represents the highest possible evaluation), she was highly recommended by the faculty member who supervised her professionally as a public speaking instructor, and she had provided oral critiques as an instructor in four semester long performance classes and had for over two two years worked as an assistant coach in a nationally renowned university forensics program (Joeckel, Note 2).

Preparation of Data for Analysis

Three steps were required to prepare the data for analysis: transcription of critiques, identification of themes, and categorization of themes.

Transcription of Critiques. Written transcripts were made of both critiques following a modification of the transcription procedures used by conversational analysts (Goodwin, 1981; Schenkein, 1978).

Identification of Themes. The researcher then identified the themes within the critiques according to rules established by Sprague & Schenone (Note 1). A theme is the smallest unit within a critique which advances one criticism (or makes one point) and serves as the basic unit of analysis in this study. To identify the themes, the researcher replayed each critique approximately 10 times until she was confident that all themes were accurately identified.

Categorization of Themes. After all the themes occurring in each critique were identified, the themes were categorized according to Sprague's (1971) 16 item taxonomy and three additional categories devised specifically for this investigation. Sprague's categories

consist of all possible combinations of four dichotomous categories: content--delivery, positive--negative, personal--impersonal, and holistic--atomistic. Because some of the themes could not be assigned to any of the categories devised by Sprague, the researcher devised three new categories: social conversation (e.g., "I appreciated hearing your speech"), procedural (e.g., "I'm gonna do what I typically do 'n' divide my comments into content and delivery and just talk briefly about both of those areas"), and perception check (e.g., "Okay?", which this researcher perceived to mean "Do you understand what I mean?").

Data Tabulation and Analysis

For each critique, tabulations were made of the number of themes occurring within each feedback category, identified as helping participants to improve their speechmaking ability, or making them feel good or bad about their speechmaking abilities. This data allowed the researcher to determine whether there were certain types of feedback more likely than others to be perceived as helpful, or making the participants feel good or bad about their speechmaking abilities.

Results

Themes Perceived as Helpful

In Critique 1, the speaker perceived 3 types of themes as helpful: "content, negative, personal, and atomistic" (3 times), "delivery, negative, personal, and atomistic" (twice), and "content, positive, personal, and atomistic" (once). In Critique 2, the speaker perceived 2 types of themes as helpful: "content, negative, personal, and atomistic" (6 times) and "delivery, negative, personal, and atomistic" (3 times).

These findings provide the information necessary to answer the first research question:

> Research Question 1: What types of oral teacher feedback statements are identified by speakers as helpful to them in improving their speeches?

The findings indicate both speakers were most likely to identify as helpful feedback directed toward them personally and which identified a specific feature of the speech needing improvement.

Themes Perceived as Promoting Good Feelings

In Critique 1, the speaker perceived 3 categories as promoting good feelings about speechmaking ability: "delivery, negative, personal and atomistic" (twice), "content, positive, personal, and atomistic" (once) and "content, positive, personal, and holistic" (once). In Critique 2, the speaker perceived 6 categories as promoting good feelings about speechmaking ability: "content, positive, personal, and holistic" (3 times), "delivery, positive, personal, and atomistic" (twice), "content, positive, personal, and holistic" (once), "content, negative, personal, and atomistic" (once), "delivery, positive, personal, and holistic" (once), and "delivery, negative, personal, and atomistic" (once).

These findings provide the information necessary to answer the first part of the second research question:

> Research Question 2: What types of oral feedback statements are identified by speakers as making them feel good about their speechmaking abilities?

The findings indicate agreement and potential disagreement on the type of feedback identified as making the speakers feel good about their

speechmaking abilities. Both speakers identified 3 types of feedback as promoting good feelings about speechmaking abilities: "content, positive, personal, and atomistic," "content, positive, personal, and holistic," and "delivery, negative, personal, and atomistic." Thus they are in agreement that personal feedback is perceived as promoting good feelings about speechmaking abilities. Also, it is important to note that 4 of these feedback statements were perceived as promoting good feelings about one's abilities despite being critical (negative) of certain elements of the speech's content or delivery.

In addition, Speaker 2 identified 3 types of feedback as promoting good feelings about speechmaking abilities not also identified by Speaker 1: "delivery, positive, personal, and atomistic" (twice), "content, negative, personal, and atomistic" (once), and "delivery, positive, personal, and holistic" (once). This indicates, as would appear intuitively obvious, that while there is some consistency among students in the types of feedback affecting self-esteem, there are also interesting individual differences as well.

Themes Perceived as Promoting Bad Feelings

In Critique 1, no feedback category was identified as promoting bad feelings about speechmaking ability. In Critique 2, the speaker perceived only two feedback statements, classified as "content, negative, personal, and atomistic," as promoting bad feelings about speechmaking ability.

These findings provide only limited information for answering the second part of the second research question:

Research Question 2: What types of oral feedback statements are identified by speakers as making

them feel bad about their speechmaking abilities?

The above findings would suggest that feedback would be perceived as promoting bad feelings about speechmaking abilities if it is critical (negative). However, this conclusion is tenuous at best as it is based on limited information of only one of the two speakers.

Discussion

Implications of the Findings to Past Research and the Classroom

Research Question 1: What types of oral teacher feedback statements are identified by speakers as helpful to them in improving their speeches?

Both speakers most frequently identified as helpful feedback directed toward them personally and which focused on specific features of their speeches needing improvement. This result supports Youngs' finding that students identify negative, personal, and atomistic feedback as most helpful, and this information has interesting implications for previous research conducted by Vogel (1973). Vogel's study attempted to assess whether varying feedback also affected differences in improvement in speechmaking. However, among the three different types of feedback manipulated in Vogel's study, none of them were the same combination of negative, personal, and atomistic feedback students perceive they need to improve their speechmaking. Accordingly, it is possible that Vogel did not find a relationship between feedback and speechmaking improvement, for the simple reason that he did not study the right type of feedback. Future research should focus on this possibility. The implications of these findings for the classroom teacher are twofold. First, because students most frequently identify negative feedback as helpful, oral critiques of speeches should be interspersed with feedback statements informing the student of

particular features of the speech needing improvement. Second, because positive statements were rarely identified as helpful, the teacher should avoid giving only positive oral comments, if an objective of the oral critique is improved speechmaking.

Research Question 2: What types of oral feedback statements are identified by speakers as making them feel good or bad about their speechmaking abilities?

While the two speakers often reported the same types of feedback as promoting good feelings about speechmaking abilities, there were also instances in which they identified differing types of feedback statements as promoting good feelings. Nonetheless, whether the feedback was positive or negative, atomistic or holistic, or addressed content rather than delivery, each feedback statement identified as promoting good feelings was also identified as "personal." This might suggest that only personal feedback carries with it the potential for promoting good feelings about one's speechmaking ability. However, it is also important to point out that in both critiques, there appeared nearly an exclusive preponderance of personal as opposed to impersonal feedback. In fact, in both critiques taken together there appeared only one instance of impersonal feedback. An interesting objective for future research would be to contrast the impact of personal and impersonal feedback on students' self-esteem.

While positive feedback was more frequently reported as promoting good feelings about speechmaking ability, the reports of negative feedback promoting good feelings about speechmaking ability are particularly interesting. While perceiving negative feedback as promoting good feelings at first seems unlikely (why would learning

one's speech needs improvement promote good feelings about speechmaking ability?), close examination of the videotaped critiques, at the times the negative feedback is identified as promoting good feelings, yields evidence supporting the old adage, "its not what you say but how you say it." Speaker 1 stopped the tape during a negative comment about delivery to report the feedback as promoting good feelings and said, "Uhm right here not really what she said jus' kinda how she acted you know she was smilin' at me and she was telling me something I was doin' wrong but yet she was smilin' 'nd I felt better about it . . . 'nd she did that pretty much throughout the whole all of her comments she made me feel good because she was always smiling giving me a reassuring look and here that was really apparent I thought." Later during another negative statement Speaker 1 stopped the tape and said, "I thought that was good cause she was telling me something she does wrong too and I felt good cause I do I have you know nervous habits but it made me feel better to know that she did too and I wasn't all alone (laughs) and all by myself." Thus, while the participant instructor used negative feedback to inform the speaker about an aspect of her speech needing improvement, she also used nonverbal behaviors (smiling, reassuring looks) and examples from her own speaking experience to make the feedback more palatable to the speaker. Andersen's (1979) research on immediacy bears directly on this finding. Andersen defines immediacy as behavior reducing the physical or psychological distance between a teacher and student, and has found immediacy predictive of students' willingness to follow teachers' suggestions and pursue additional related instruction. Applied to the present study, immediacy may be used to explain why some of the negative feedback was perceived as promoting positive

feelings. When negative feedback was coupled with immediacy (e.g., smiling and reassuring looks), the students were more likely to feel good about themselves and the teacher.

The students' reports of negative feedback promoting good feelings about speechmaking ability contradict Bostrom's (1963) findings. In his study, Bostrom provided all positive or all negative feedback after student speeches and then measured the students' attitudes. Bostrom found positive feedback promoted good feelings about self as a speaker and negative feedback promoted bad feelings about self as a speaker. There are two explanations for the discrepancy between this study's findings and Bostrom's. First, Bostrom provided all positive or all negative feedback regardless of the students' performances, while this study provided a more realistic combination of positive and negative feedback. If a student worked very hard on a speech and, despite his/her efforts, received all negative comments, it seems reasonable that s/he would think less of self as a speaker. However, if the same student were to receive positive and negative feedback on his/her speech, s/he may be better able to keep the negative statements in perspective and not think less of self as a speaker. A second explanation for these contradictory findings lies in the manner in which the feedback was delivered. Bostrom reports that the feedback was given in a "neutral" tone of voice, whereas the participant instructor in the present study is personable and warm in her method of delivery. Presenting the negative feedback in a neutral voice did not allow Bostrom to exhibit immediacy behaviors (Andersen, 1979) and, therefore, his feedback was not likely to make students feel good about themselves. The feedback presented in this study demonstrated immediacy behaviors and the

students responded positively to negative feedback.

The classroom teacher, then, can be assured that positive feedback will most likely promote good feelings about speechmaking ability, and that skillfully delivered negative statements need not make students feel bad and can even promote good feelings about self as speaker. The classroom teacher should be aware, however, that less agreement exists among students concerning the types of feedback perceived as promoting good feelings than perceived as helpful. Therefore, teachers who wish to foster positive speaker images must realize that the types of feedback making students feel good about themselves varies, and, consequently, the teacher needs to direct different types of feedback to different students based on his/her knowledge of them as individuals.

The findings concerning the types of feedback perceived as promoting bad feelings about speechmaking ability were inconclusive. The first speaker reported no such statements, while the second speaker identified only two, both of which were critical of some aspect of the student's speech. While compatible with Bostrom's (1963) finding that negative feedback effects negative self-esteem, owing to the lack of external validity associated with that study and limited data obtained in this one, it remains uncertain whether negative feedback is most likely to promote negative self-appraisals. Future research should address this issue.

Summary

Using a grounded ethnographic method, this study examined students' perceptions of a teacher's oral feedback on their speeches. The students identified feedback statements perceived as helpful to them in improving their speechmaking and statements perceived as

promoting good or bad feelings about their speechmaking abilities.

The students identified feedback which indicates a specific part of the speech needing improvement as most helpful. Positive feedback consistently made students feel good about themselves but rarely was identified as helpful. Negative feedback was the only type perceived as promoting bad feelings about speechmaking abilities, although occasionally negative feedback was also perceived as promoting good feelings about speechmaking abilities. Whenever the negative feedback was perceived as promoting good feelings the teacher was exhibiting positive immediacy behaviors (i.e., smiling, giving reassuring looks).

Based on this study's findings, several tentative recommendations are made for speech teachers. Teachers are encouraged to specify what students must change to improve their speechmaking. Although students consistently identified positive feedback as promoting good feelings about speechmaking abilities, teachers are advised to intersperse their feedback with both positive and negative comments, because negative (constructively critical) comments are more often perceived as helpful. Lastly, teachers are cautioned that while negative comments have the potential to promote negative self-appraisals, they may also actually promote self-esteem when accompanied by positive immediacy (e.g., head nods, reassuring looks, and smiles).

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